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# Los Angeles WAVE NEWSPAPERS

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## 100 days in, slow recovery still haunts fire victims

Some Altadena residents turning to neighbors, not the government, for aid

By **STEPHEN ODUNTAN**  
Contributing Writer

ALTADENA — It has been 100 days since a fast-moving wildfire tore through the foothills of Altadena, displacing dozens of families. Many residents remain without permanent housing and are still waiting for government aid.

For some families affected by the fire, recovery has been slow and uneven, with much of the support coming from neighbors, not the government, residents said.

"We've been displaced since Jan. 8," said Trenton Jordan, a

*Stephen Oduntan is a freelance reporter for Wave Newspapers.*



Two women console each other as they survey the desolation left by the Eaton fire. Most Altadena residents who lost their homes in the wildfire are still struggling to rebuild their homes and their lives.

Photo by Mayra Beltran/Los Angeles County

personal trainer and father of three. "My garage burned down — I had about \$20,000 worth of training equipment in there. We've been living out of Airbnbs and still haven't heard back from FEMA."

Jordan said he, his wife — an emergency room physician assistant — and their children have moved between hotels and short-term rentals in Alhambra and Glendale.

"The Airbnb we're in now costs us about \$9,000 a month," he said. "My wife's working two ER jobs. We've only got one car. We're just trying to figure it out."

Jordan said he is not alone. Lance Mitchell, head football coach at John Muir High School and president of the nonprofit No Finish Lines, said his family home was also destroyed in the fire.

"My grandparents bought that house in the '60s," Mitchell said. "Even though I moved out years ago, it was always home. That was my anchor. Now it's gone."

Mitchell said his organization, which typically focuses on youth development, shifted to fire relief after the disaster.

"We had families living out of suitcases. Still are," he said. "The recovery has been driven by the people who were affected. It's been the community helping itself."

While grassroots efforts have supported some families, survivors said they are facing ongoing challenges. Rent costs have increased, insurance coverage has been limited and some who applied for assistance said they are still waiting to hear back.

"Our insurance didn't cover displacement," Mitchell said. "All the funds are going to rebuild the house, but not to house my father in the meantime."

Faith-based organizations have also played a role in response efforts. Members of Holy Assembly Church of God in Christ said the church began offering emergency assistance within hours of the fire. Since

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### STREET BEAT

**'What superhero do we need today?'**



**CARMELLA TOWELS**  
LOS ANGELES

"Jesus Christ. But a lot of people don't acknowledge him. We're looking at superheroes that fly or have mighty strength or are all powerful."



**NORMA MCFADDEN**  
LOS ANGELES

"I like always liked Batman. He's a superhero like my husband."



**MARY GARCIA**  
ROSEMEAD

"Someone who could make the economy better. It's going to get really, really bad before it gets any good, so we need somebody to help us."



## IN PROTEST OF TRUMP



These four people were among thousands of protesters who descended on downtown April 5 as part of a nationwide series of 'Hands Off!' demonstrations in opposition to the Trump administration's steep tariffs, program cuts and mass layoffs of federal workers. Other rallies were held in Glendale, Culver City, Pasadena, Torrance, Long Beach and Lakewood. Story on page 2.

Photo by Viola Gray

## Council looks to fund new anti-opioid pilot program

FROM CITY NEWS SERVICE

SOUTH LOS ANGELES — In a move to combat substance use, members of the City Council called for a new pilot program for the distribution of naloxone, an opioid reversal medication, in local neighborhoods.

On a 10-0 vote April 4, council members instructed the chief legislative analyst to report on the resources such a pilot would require. The City Council expects to fund the program using available dollars from a 2021 opioid settlement.

Council members Bob Blumenfield, Ysabel Jurado, Adrin Nazarian, Nithya Raman and Katy Yaroslavy were absent during the vote.

On Feb. 7, Councilman Curren Price and Councilwoman Heather Hutt, who represent South Los Angeles communities, introduced the motion highlighting the importance of addressing the opioid crisis.

According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

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## Group fighting to protect expectant Black mothers

By **DARLENE DONLOE**  
Contributing Writer

LOS ANGELES — Black Women for Wellness LA is hosting several community-based events during Black Maternal Health Week, a national observance held each year April 11-17.

The annual event, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the alarming disparities in maternal health outcomes affecting Black women in the United States, highlights efforts led by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance and collectively works



gate pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum with confidence and care. The launch event will bring together Black pregnant women, Black mothers, maternal health advocates, community leaders, and Kaiser Permanente healthcare professionals to foster dialogue and share actionable solutions for improving Black maternal health outcomes.

The event will include Community Conversations, an engaging discussion on the impact of racial disparities in maternal care and the importance of joy-centered, culturally competent care and support, and Networking &

**April 11-17 is  
Black Maternal  
Health Week**

to 4 p.m. April 11 at the Kaiser Permanente Baldwin Hills-Crenshaw Medical offices, 3782 W. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Black Women for Wellness also will host the second annual Black Mamas Birthing Tour to raise awareness of culturally affirming care options for Black pregnant women and birthing people in Los Angeles County. The tour, a daylong event April 15, will showcase birthing spaces



# Some Altadena fire victims still waiting for assistance

**FIRE from Page 1**

then, the church has continued to provide meals, donations and emotional support.

"Even though the smoke has cleared, the ashes remain," said Pia Michelle Jones, a church attendee. "These are multigenerational homes. How do you pass down love and wealth when the house is gone?"

The church has also partnered with wellness practitioners to offer trauma care. An event scheduled for April 16 will provide free yoga and healing resources for survivors.

Jordan said the fire's emotional toll has hit his children hardest.

"My kids lost everything — beds, toys, their sense of home," he said. "They've been sleeping in different beds every few weeks. It's taken a toll."

Despite the hardships, residents said the community remains resilient. Events held in recent weeks have offered moments of connection and encouragement.

"We wanted to do something where people could come out and see each other in a positive light," said Deon Shorter, a co-organizer of a recent gathering and member of No Finish Lines. "There's power in just showing up for one another."



Residents mourn the loss of family property in the aftermath of the Altadena fire. Many multigenerational homeowners lost everything in the fire and are still awaiting assistance.

Photo courtesy of Writtenvision

Some families have started to rebuild, while others said they are concerned about the

long-term future of their neighborhood. Jones said some long-time residents are under pres-

sure to sell their properties.

"Don't amplify stories about people cashing out," she said. "A lot of folks are selling out of desperation. The goal should be to keep them on their land."

Mitchell expressed concern about equity in recovery efforts. "Resources aren't always getting to the Black and Latino families who need them most," he said. "And the people distributing the help — many of them aren't from here. They don't always know who's been impacted."

Some residents said they have yet to receive the aid they were promised, despite outreach from local organizations. This week, Los Angeles County officials approved steps aimed at accelerating the recovery. On April 8, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion to establish a unified permitting authority within the Altadena One-Stop Recovery Permitting Center. The new unit is intended to speed up the rebuilding process for fire survivors.

"No rebuild permits have been issued in Altadena, and that's unacceptable," Supervisor Kathryn Barger said in a statement. "Today's motion will cut through the red tape to get my Altadena constituents back on track to rebuilding faster. We don't have time to waste."

The permitting authority will include senior liaisons from departments such as Public Works and Public Health and will be tasked with resolving conflicts in real time. Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath said the measure is intended to ensure that recovery is "equitable and accessible for every resident."

In an email to The Wave, a spokesperson for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority said the agency supported 224 unhoused individuals who took refuge in Red Cross shelters during the evacuation. However, the spokesperson said the authority was not involved in assisting residents who had stable housing prior to the wildfires, noting that FEMA and the Red Cross were responsible for those cases.

"When you pray, think about Altadena," Jones said. "Because we're still here. Still waiting. Still rebuilding."

## Black Women for Wellness plan maternal health events

**MATERNAL HEALTH from Page 1**

Each year in the United States, Black women are dying during pregnancy or after pregnancy. More than 80% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that issues of racism and bias persist in health care.

Unconscious racial bias in the medical field, as well as a lack of adequate resources in Black communities, are said to be driving forces behind America's Black maternal health crisis. The risk for Black women is still present no matter their level of wealth, education or fame.

Organizations like the CDC and Black Mamas Matter Alliance are working to address these disparities through initiatives like the Enhancing Reviews and Surveillance to Eliminate Maternal Mortality Program and the Maternal Health Collaborative to Advance Racial Equity.

Key factors contributing to disparities include differences in access to quality healthcare and underlying chronic conditions contribute to these disparities. Social determinants of health include factors like unstable



Black Women for Wellness will observe Black Maternal Health Week with a series of events designed to help pregnant Black women.

Courtesy photo

housing, transportation access, food insecurity, substance use, violence, and economic inequality.

"Why we die more than our white

counterparts is a combination of things," Brown said. "We are bold in calling out systemic racism and barriers that affect our health and wellness. It's in being rooted in the community and hearing the stories of the community."

"Black mamas are not being listened to. Their concerns are falling on deaf ears. There is this notion that Black women can take more pain. Those biases speak to the disparities. These deaths are preventable. Food deserts play a part, so do the maternity ward care closures that are happening."

Brown said it's essential to ensure Black mamas are aware and have access to culturally affirming resources.

"We want to connect them with health providers in the community," she said. "We want them to be healthy and happy and thriving."

Brown, 30, said culturally affirming resources start with "listening to the mama."

"When we talk about culturally re-affirming resources, we mean understanding the need," said Brown, originally from Leimert Park. "Think about a mom going into labor. So many factors must be considered."

"Who and what do we want in the space? Some might want music. Someone might want to use a doula to help

ease us through the moment. Others may want to incorporate aromatherapy. What holistic supports can they have during this birthing experience?"

Expanding access to coverage and care can help address disparities. Initiatives like postpartum coverage extension want to improve health outcomes, diversify the healthcare workforce, increase access to culturally and linguistically appropriate care, and improve data collection and reporting. Enhancing data collection and analysis helps identify areas for improvement.

Brown said the goal is for mamas to be comfortable.

"We want to provide a comfortable space," she said. "We want to let our healthcare providers know that all mamas are not the same."

Founded in 1997, Black Women for Wellness LA is a nonprofit organization committed to the health and well-being of Black women and girls.

Through education, advocacy and leadership development, the organization seeks to empower communities and create lasting change in reproductive health, rights, and justice.

For more information about upcoming events or to RSVP, email Gabrielle Brown at [gabrielle@bwwla.com](mailto:gabrielle@bwwla.com) or visit [bwwla.org](http://bwwla.org).

## South L.A. pilot program would address opioid crisis

**OPIOID from Page 1**

Health, more than 3,000 people died in 2023 from drug overdoses.

The council members' motion noted that in the past decade there's been misuse of prescription painkillers, heroin, and fentanyl that has plagued communities. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 times more po-

tent than heroin and 100 times more than morphine, has been a major contributor to the crisis.

The council members said the drug's availability has led to a dramatic spike, accounting for more than half of all alcohol and drug overdoses across the city, particularly in vulnerable areas such as South Los Angeles.

A recent report from the county Department of Public Health found that fentanyl-related deaths increased from 109 to 1,970 between 2016 and 2023.

"By expanding access to naloxone, we can empower first responders, community members and individuals to act swiftly and reduce fatali-

ties, especially in poor neighborhoods where the death rate from fentanyl was at least twice as high," the motion said.

The City Council has taken other steps to address opioids in the city. Last year, the council advanced another pilot program intended to provide residents with fentanyl testing equipment. Funds from the opioid

settlement would be used for that program as well.

The city is expected to receive \$29.6 million to \$53.3 million over an 18-year period from two settlements reached with opioid distributors in 2021.

Approximately 80% of dollars from the opioid settlement is restricted for future opioid

remediation and the remaining 20% for opioid-related projects or to reimburse the city for the purchase of Narcan or training for first responders, according to city documents.

In June 2024, the City Council allocated \$3 million of the settlement funds for a proposed respite center within a half-mile radius of MacArthur Park.

## Accused gang leader pleads not guilty to 43 charges

**FROM CITY NEWS SERVICE**

LOS ANGELES — Alleged gang leader and so-called rap "godfather" Eugene Henley Jr., also known as "Big U," pleaded not guilty April 8 to charges contained in a 43-count federal indictment accusing him of racketeering, firearms

but that is expected to change. A detention hearing originally set for April 10 was rescheduled for April 22.

Before he surrendered to authorities, the self-described anti-gang activist from the South L.A. community of Hyde Park posted videos on Instagram denying any wrongdoing.

"As the indictment alleges, Mr. Henley led a criminal enterprise whose conduct ranged from murder to sophisticated fraud that included stealing from taxpayers and a charity," acting U.S. Attorney Joseph McNally said in a statement last month. "Eradicating gangs and organized crime is the Department of Justice's top

ing famous athletes, including Basketball Hall of Famer and former Lakers center Shaquille O'Neal and Golden State Warriors four-time all-star forward Draymond Green, by persuading them to donate money to charity — cash that he allegedly pocketed himself.

In addition, Henley is accused of

present, Henley's Big U Enterprise "operated as a mafia-like organization that utilized Henley's stature and long-standing association with the Rollin' 60s and other street gangs to intimidate businesses and individuals in Los Angeles. Henley is widely regarded as a leader within the Rollin' 60s and rose to prominence in